‘The Eagles are coming!’

Tolkien’s Eucatastrophic Reinterpretation of the ‘Beasts of Battle’ Motif in *The Hobbit* and in *The Lord of The Rings*

Łukasz Neubauer (Koszalin)

The spectacular and, on the whole, unanticipated appearances of the Great Eagles in the heat of decisive military confrontations in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are regularly (and justifiably) examined in view of *eucatastrophe*, Tolkien’s Christian counterpart to the Classical plot device nowadays usually referred to under the Latin term of *deus ex machina*[1]. In fact, they are hardly ever mentioned in a context which would not entail some unforeseen intervention leading, directly or not, to the ultimate resolution of the ordeal, and thus bringing the narrative to a happy (or at least happier) ending. Hence, whether it be the battle of the Five Armies (*The Hobbit*) or the final confrontation between the anti-Sauron league and the forces of the East (*The Lord of the Rings*), the Eagles are always where they are meant to be, initiating or merely portending the long-awaited time of joy and deliverance to all the good souls of Middle-earth.

Before we take a closer look at their employment as a narrative tool, though, it may be worthwhile to have a glimpse into the Great Eagles’ general appearance and nature. This would, of course, later serve as a useful platform of reference for their further assessment as a literary device with, perhaps most importantly, a vital theological import. The strong, majestic birds of Tolkien’s Middle-earth novels are not only greater in size than their ordinary aquiline cousins (although not as big as the Eagles of Manwë, their primordial ancestors), they are indeed the supreme rulers of the skies, dedicated to their allies and merciless to their foes. It is significant, though, that notwithstanding their intimidating physique, Gwaihir’s kindred are depicted as “noble-hearted” (H 150), which seems a perfect combination of features in a world where clear-cut forces of good and evil are constantly at war with one another. What is most intriguing, however, to the unwearying seekers of Tolkien’s medieval stimuli is the fact that particularly in these two novels the Eagles appear solely in the broad context of various military operations, thus inevitably calling to mind the ‘beasts of battle’ trope repeatedly found in early medieval poems of principally Germanic provenance.

1 *Deus ex machina* is obviously a Latin loan translation of the Greek term ἀπὸ μηχανῆς θεός, meaning ‘god out of the machine’. The original Hellenic expression is, however, not normally used in modern literary criticism.

The term itself was coined and discussed at length by the American scholar Francis P. Magoun Jr. in his pioneering article published in 1955 in the fifty-sixth issue of *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, although the very idea appears to have been first explored, albeit not so extensively, three years earlier by C.M. Bowra in his excellent (though now understandably a little bit dated) book on heroic poetry (467). As a general rule, the 'beasts of battle' trope pertains to three carnivorous animals—the raven, the eagle and the wolf—whose ominous presence prior to, during and, particularly, in the aftermath of military activities must have been a recurrent sight on the corpse-strewn battlefields of Finnesburg (5-7), Brunanburh (60-65), Maldon (96f, 106f) as well as other theatres of early medieval warfare, not necessarily on the fringes of north-western Europe.

Notwithstanding the fact that there are actually numerous and sometimes disturbingly graphic references to the aforesaid carrion-eaters (acting in varying combinations, in unison as well as in isolation) to be found in the immense corpus of early European literature,[2] it is customary today to examine them in a broad context of particularly Old Germanic culture where their depictions appear to be most conventionalised. The main focus of modern scholarship has been, by and large, on their intriguing poetic potential and its diverse implications—from the more emblematic threat of imminent death, which the fear-provoking triad unavoidably evokes, through the distinctive spiritual relationship that two of them (the wolf and the raven) have with the principal Norse deity Odin, to the more naturalistic approach where the three become a crucial element in the poet's ghastly depiction of the post-combat reality. Needless to say, all these uses find their potent verbal representation in especially skaldic poetry where various references to the 'beasts of battle' are made by way of numerous figurative (and sometimes highly elaborate) synonyms that enabled the Norse poets to meet the strict requirements of the alliterative line. This is obviously less the case with early English poetry, where the metrical pattern is not as regular, and thus the semiotic potential may be more fully realised, as in the afore-alluded battle poems where, as Magoun argued, the three creatures often appear to be "ornamental rather than... essential" (83).

Although *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* first came out in, respectively, 1937 and 1954/55 (i.e. before the publication of Magoun's article in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*), it seems improbable that during the writing of his two most famous novels Tolkien was not aware of the persistent presence of ravens, eagles and wolves in especially Old Germanic literature. In fact, the very three carrion-eaters are explicitly referred to in some of his recently published allitera-

2 Some of the most compelling images of the 'beasts of battle' trope (albeit not necessarily depicted as a triad) may be identified in numerous texts of, for instance, early Germanic (e.g. *Beowulf*), Celtic (e.g. *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*) as well as Slavic (e.g. *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*) provenance.

tive poems, namely *The Lay of Gudrún*[3] and *The Fall of Arthur*[4] which are both thought to have been written at some point in the mid- or late 1930s, i.e. about two decades before Magoun's clear-cut identification of the 'beasts of battle' trope. Several more analogies, both essential and ornamental, of primary as well as secondary importance to the plot, might also be identified in some of his other works, as is for instance the case with the portentous ravens that appear in an early version of the poem *Bombadil Goes Boating*[5] or the troublesome, though in all likelihood imagined, wolf in *Farmer Giles of Ham*[6].

Tolkien would not have been himself of course, if the countless themes, tropes and motifs borrowed from numerous, chiefly early medieval, sources and then superimposed on top of the colourful world of his imagination had not been subject to some fundamental alterations and/or additions whose ultimate purpose would be to make them fit in the complex ethical principles of his sub-created universe. Not surprisingly, the Great Eagles are no exception, appearing infrequently, but always spectacularly in his two most famous novels: *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Seen at face value, Gwaihir's kin might seem to have much to do with the traditional Germanic 'beasts of battle'. They are of course full-fledged members of the original cast list, which in the Middle-earth novels sometimes becomes reduced in number due to the absence of their usual companions, both corvine and lupine.[7] Just like their medieval prototypes, Tolkien's Great Eagles usually come into sight when there is a significant military confrontation under way and almost exclusively in connection with the One Ring, although the latter may not always be fully acknowledged by the birds themselves and/or the readers. In *The Hobbit* they first appear at the time when Thorin Oakenshield and his companions are assailed by the vengeful goblins on the eastern slopes of the Misty Mountains and then at the great battle of the Five Armies. In the first case, they are incited by some "uproar in the forest" and "wolves' voices... in the woods" (122), which fills them "with curiosity to know what [is] afoot" (123). In the second, they are reported to have "long had suspicion of the goblins' mustering...; and at length smelling battle from afar they... come speeding

3 "The hungry eagle, / the hoary wolf, / the ravens are ready / to rend your [i.e. Högni's men's] flesh" (stanza 66); "There is crying of ravens, / cold howls the wolf, / shields are shimmer-ing, / shafts uplifted" (stanza 97).

4 "Among ruinous rocks ravens croaking / eagles answered in the air wheeling; / wolves were howling on the woods border" (lines 76-78).

5 "Dwarves going to and fro, Grey-elves from the Havens / on strange journeys in the Shire, gathering of ravens, / rumours in whispering trees, shadows on the borders" (quoted in 2014 edition of *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*).

6 "He [i.e. Giles] had his hands full (he said) keeping the wolf from the door" (10).

7 There are, of course, numerous references to wolves in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (e.g. the wargs or the battling ram Grond). Their ultimate impact on the narrative, however, does not seem to be as significant as that of the Great Eagles.

down the gale in the nick of time" (349). In *The Lord of the Rings* a mysterious eagle is spotted far in the sky by members of the Fellowship (Aragorn and Legolas) around the time of the orcs' surprise attack on Amon Hen (385, 413, 423). After that the Eagles are not to be seen until the very final moments of the War of the Ring, in their memorable last-minute appearance at the battle of the Morannon (893, 948). They are then instrumental in rescuing Frodo and Sam from the slopes of Mount Doom (949-951) and bringing the good news of Sauron's downfall to the apprehensive people of Minas Tirith (963).

The Eagles are also mentioned (usually indirectly) in the context of Gandalf's numerous endeavours, such as his dramatic escapes from the pinacle of Orthanc (495) and the peak of Zirakzigil (502). It is also the by-then-white-coated wizard who pleads their great lord Gwaihir to "spe[e]d away south" (950) and save the heroic hobbits. His special relationship with the Eagles may therefore be seen as Tolkien's creative reinterpretation of a similar bond said to exist between the Norse god Odin (who, in fact, resembles Gandalf in more than just general appearance and attire) and his two message-carrying ravens Huginn and Muninn.

However, when it comes to the most elementary aspects of their character and demeanour, the Great Eagles turn out to be poles apart from the original 'beasts of battle'. They are not only far more human in their interaction with the folks of the anti-Sauron league, but, perhaps most significantly, seem to possess certain distinctive Christian features which are obviously not to be found in their Old Germanic counterparts and whose roots evidently lie in the enormous liveliness of Tolkien's Catholic imagination. They may not always have direct parallels in the Scripture, of course, but the Judeo-Christian 'muse' is indisputably there, clearly reinterpreting the ancient heathen trope and putting it on the right track of Christian thought. Worth observing is also the fact that, regardless of Tolkien's genuine intentions, in terms of their outward appearance (mainly colouristic, but not only) and widespread cultural associations, the eagle is naturally far more likely to be associated with the Divine than the somewhat demonic black-plumed raven and the grey-coated wolf.

As far as their martial aspects are concerned, the Great Eagles do not gather above the battlefields of Middle-earth *slít*[*a*] *nái* (*Vǫluspá* 50) "to tear the corpses", and thus æses *brucan* (*The Battle of Brunanburh* 63) "partake of carrion". They are not in the least æses *georn* (*The Battle of Maldon* 107) "eager for food" that would certainly be there in abundance and ready for pecking. Their last-ditch appearances near the Lonely Mountain or at the Morannon are brought about by an entirely different set of circumstances that have far less to do with the birds' instinctive impulse and more with their conscious judgment of what is morally right and wrong. In this way one may easily observe that Tolkien's animistic eagles are in effect endowed with what in Christian theology constitutes the most fundamental ingredients of human nature, that is to say

their ability to reason and the power of independent choice. Indeed, with the exceptions of Beorn's numerous companions of fang and feather as well as the message-carrying thrush and the old raven Roäc (*The Hobbit*), the Great Eagles are indeed the only animals in the Middle-earth bestiary that can truly communicate with one another and, most importantly for the course of the events, with the peoples of the West. What is more, regardless of their dealings with Gandalf, they seem to do it entirely on their own voluntary initiative, without any contract or command on behalf of those who are in sometimes desperate need of their assistance.

All this appears to be intriguingly consistent with the words of Hugh of Fouilloy, the twelfth-century French cleric for whom these magnificent creatures were a true paragon of dignity and intelligence, creatures that embodied the *subtilis sanctorum intelligentia* (*Aviarium* LX) "subtle intelligence of saints". Despite their selfless dedication to the good cause, many times reflected in their last-minute interventions, the Great Eagles are, of course, only a distant resonance of the Christian concept of sainthood or, as a matter of fact, any other form of transcendental existence, such as the angels. Nonetheless, their somewhat imprecise connection with the Divine may seem to be of particular notice here. After all, their primordial ancestors, the legendary birds of Manwë, are initially referred to as "spirits in the shape of hawks and eagles" (S 27). It must be observed, however, that, over the years, Tolkien's idea of the Eagles appears to have evolved quite significantly, the author himself appearing not to know precisely whether they ought in fact to be interpreted as bird-shaped spirits of the Maiar (MR 138) or as self-conscious and intelligent beasts, albeit with no soul of their own (411).

Endowed with the responsibility of bringing "word to him of well nigh all that passed in Arda" (S 27), Manwë's eagles may once again bring to mind Odin's corvine companions (also members of the original 'beasts of battle' cast) that, according to the Icelandic mythographer Snorri Sturluson, *sitja á ǫxlum honum ok segja í eyru honum ǫll tíðendi, þau er þeir sjá eða heyra* (*Gylfaginning* 38) "sit upon his shoulders and whisper into his ears all the tidings which they see or hear". The Great Eagles of the Misty Mountains are perhaps not as talkative as Huginn and Muninn, their possible legendary predecessors, but they do regularly communicate with Gandalf who, at least to some extent, appears to be Tolkien's Christian alternative to the Norse god of war and poetry. Much as the covertly consecrated wizard, the birds are thus assigned with alternative, if evidently analogous duties, providing immediate assistance in the matters of greatest concern. Seen in this light, the Eagles may thus to some extent resemble the Lord's angels or certain Catholic saints, patrons of difficult or even apparently impossible causes (such as, for instance, St. Rita or St. Jude Thaddeus). Gwaihir's kin are therefore there when the already faint hopes are

getting even fainter and the only means of survival could be provided by some indefinite *deus ex machina*.

This brings us to the oft-discussed concept of *eucatastrophe* in which the Eagles partake as many as five times (twice in *The Hobbit* and at least three times in *The Lord of the Rings*[8]). According to Tolkien, the term he himself coined for the purpose of the essay *On Fairy-stories* (first published in 1947) should be understood as an unanticipated "happy turn [at the end of] a story which pierces [one] with a joy that brings tears" (L 89). It is "a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur [which] denies... universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium" (FS 99), it is indeed a "sudden glimpse of Truth" (L 89). In the Gospels, Tolkien maintains, it is obviously the two crucial moments of the Birth of Christ (as the *eucatastrophe* of Man's history) and the Resurrection (as the *eucatastrophe* of the story of the Incarnation). Seen in a military context, however, the *Evangelium* in question turns out to be the critical factor which brings about a hitherto unanticipated victory, when the odds seem to be insurmountable and there is little or no hope for the victory. Even though the Great Eagles are not quite the sole critical and decisive factors in either the battle of the Five Armies and that of the Morannon,[9] their sudden appearances have all the symptoms—emblematic as well as essential—of being eucatastrophic. At any rate, though, the dramatic comings of the Eagles in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are obviously in stark contrast with the much less promising appearance of the eagles (and/or ravens and wolves) in early Germanic literature where the carrion-eaters are far more likely to be associated with the apprehensive sense of impending misfortune, the ill-fated climax of the conflict in which they play no small part.

It cannot be denied, then, that in the two Middle-earth novels the coming of the Eagles is always an easily detectable augury of triumph, even when up to that point the course of events seems to be suggesting a diametrically different outcome. In *The Hobbit* it is the great slaughter of both men and elves at the battle of the Five Armies, in *The Lord of the Rings* it is the engulfing "sea of enemies" (891) which swarms out of the Black Gate of Mordor and from the neighbouring hills. The near-apocalyptic catastrophe in the latter scene is further strengthened by the reader's awareness that the ensuing battle is to be

8 The actual calculation of their eucatastrophic appearances would naturally have to depend on our assessment of whether the particular situation (say, Gandalf's imprisonment atop the tower of Orthanc) was already beyond hope, as clearly seems to be the case with the entrapment of Aragorn's army in front of the Black Gate (LotR 893, 948), Frodo and Sam's engulfment by the "rivers of fire" on the slopes of Mount Doom (950) and the growing apprehension of the people of Minas Tirith (963).

9 The real turning point obviously takes places elsewhere, in the Chambers of Fire on Mount Doom where the Ring is eventually destroyed.

the ultimate confrontation between the apparently uneven forces of good and evil, a confrontation after which nothing is ever going to be the same again. The ordeal is even worsened by the fortunately inaccurate supposition that both Frodo and Sam have been captured by the Enemy,[10] and so their quest to save the world is over.

Suddenly, amidst the sounds of trumpets and whines of arrows (891), amidst the "voices roaring like a tide" (948), the air is pierced with frenzied cries of the up till then more and more desperate peoples of the West, "The eagles are coming!" (893, 948). At this point, it is difficult not to think of the great cacophony of sounds depicted by the anonymous poets of *The Finnesburg Fragment* (5-7), *The Battle of Maldon* (106-11) or *Exodus* (162-169) in which the voracious 'beasts of battle' have their significant share. Tolkien's idea for the Eagles was of course altogether different. It looks like his intention was rather to exclude them from this sonoric dissonance and, instead, make them the actual harbingers of a new world order brought about by the concurrent destruction of the One Ring. Their assumption of an entirely new role, so much different from that of the original 'beasts of battle', appears to be ingeniously accentuated by the last thoughts of swooning Pippin who subliminally connects the last-minute coming of the Great Eagles with Bilbo's tale of long ago and, perhaps, somewhat trans-textually, with the eagles, the ravens and the wolves of the ancient poetic tradition: "But no! That came in [Bilbo's] tale long long ago" (LotR 893).

As has been observed, the foremost objective of their sudden appearances in the Middle-earth novels is the more or less explicit announcement, or perhaps even proclamation, of the eucatastrophic conclusion of the battle of the Five Armies (*The Hobbit*) and the War of the Ring (*The Lord of the Rings*). However, while the role they play in the former combat could be interpreted as militarily justified,[11] their unanticipated arrival in the last battle against Sauron is not known to have any quantifiable effect on the ultimate conclusion of the conflict. Hence, the coming of the Eagles merely coincides (provided, of course, that this expression can ever be used in what is, after all, carefully planned writing) with the destruction of the One Ring and the subsequent fall of the Dark Lord. It would be inaccurate, however, to perceive them merely as some sort of a symbol or emblem of the *Evangelium*. Seen in the light of their remote but undisputed connection with Manwë, they are indeed no less than the actual essence of revelation (as well as its outward manifestation), which in

10 The thought that the Ring-bearer may have been caught by the servants of Sauron appears to be less of a concern for Gandalf who evidently suspects that the actual fate of Frodo and Sam does not necessarily have to be synonymous with the dramatic workings of Pippin's imagination.

11 It was the Eagles "who dislodged the goblins from the mountain-slopes, casting them over the precipices, or driving them down shrieking and bewildered among their foes" (H 349).

Christian theology is the very act of being in communication with God, often through vision, miracle or epiphany.

The ultimate appearance of the Eagles in the context of their biblical associations is even more striking when we take into consideration the fact that the two most significant dates in the Fellowship's quest to destroy the Ring, that is to say their leaving Rivendell (25 December) and the ultimate passing of Sauron (25 March), generally coincide with those of the two most important Christian holidays, namely Christmas and, somewhat less precisely, Easter, which obviously mark the celebrations of, respectively, the Nativity and the Resurrection.[12] It would evidently be a far-fetched claim to say that the aforesaid time frame actually settles, once and for all, the dispute over the purely Christian interpretation of Tolkien's Eagles. After all, as has been observed, at least in terms of their conceptual and structural dimensions the initial inspiration probably came from elsewhere, i.e. the 'beasts of battle' trope in especially Old Germanic literature. Nonetheless, given the overall amount of almost certainly Christian associations, it would be really hard to uphold the view that the concurrence of the dates should be of purely accidental nature. It is much more likely that Tolkien's intention was rather to make sure that the ultimate destruction of the Ring (seen as the foremost catalyst of evil in Middle-earth) should fill the same matrix, and so occur at the same (or roughly the same) time of the year as the Passion and Resurrection, which are, of course, the innermost focus of all Christian thought and constitute its dogmatic backbone.

Just as eucatastrophic, although slightly less apparent in terms of its military applicability, is also the unanticipated coming of the Eagle that brings "tidings beyond hope" (LotR 963) to the apprehensive people of Minas Tirith who, much as the convalescent Éowyn and Faramir, have been living in continuous dread of the "Darkness Unescapable" (962) since the departure of Aragorn and the Host of the West. Despite the fact that the impulsive joy of the citizens actually "well[s] up in their hearts" (963) prior to the appearance of any provable sign or verbal message from the not-too-distant frontline,[13] it can hardly

12 Easter is obviously a movable feast which in the Western Church falls on a Sunday between 22 March and 25 April. Additionally, 25 March is also celebrated as the Annunciation Day, i.e. the day when the archangel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive the Son of God. In the early days of Western Christianity, it was believed that the date of the Annunciation coincided with that of either the Passion or the Resurrection.

13 The only signs of what the people of Minas Tirith could hitherto only have hoped for are the sudden "hope and joy" (LotR 962f) that come to Faramir, the "great wind" (962) that blows his and Éowyn's hair and the unveiling of the Sun, so that "light leap[s] forth; and the waters of Anduin sh[i]ne like silver" (962). All these super-sensual phenomena may easily come unnoticed to the readers with little or no knowledge of the Scripture, but to those of a better acquaintance with the *Acts of the Apostles* the signs that directly precede the coming of the Eagle should call to mind the descent of the Holy Spirit (*Acts* 2:1-6), whose traditional avian (dove-like) form nicely corresponds with the overall image of Tolkien's majestic birds.

be denied that this mystifying communication of the *Evangelium* should be directly associated with the subsequent coming of the Eagle, whose uplifting words clearly reverberate those of *Psalms* 24 ("The Lord's is the Earth and its fullness") and 33 ("Sing gladly, O righteous, of the Lord"), both of which accentuate the need to find the happiness in God and aim at strengthening the promise of the Parousia (i.e. the second coming of Christ):

> Sing now, ye people of the Tower of Anor,
> for the Realm of Sauron is ended forever,
> and the Dark Tower is thrown down.
>
> Sing and rejoice, ye people of the Tower of Guard,
> for your watch hath not been in vain,
> and the Black Gate is broken,
> and your King hath passed through,
> and he is victorious.
>
> Sing and be glad, all ye children of the West,
> for your King shall come again,
> and he shall dwell among you
> all the days of your life. (LotR 963)

The irresistible joy invoked by the words of the Eagle is of course in stark contrast with the doom-laden passages in which the 'beasts of battle' typically appear in Old Germanic literature, as is evidently the case with the following section from *Beowulf*, informing the apprehensive audience (already in grief after the death of the poem's protagonist) how *se wonna hrefn / fus ofer fægum fela reordian, / earne secgan hu him æt æte speow, / þenden he wið wulf wæl reafode* (3024-3027) "the dark raven, eager for the fallen ones, shall tell many tales, say to the eagle how he fared at the feast, when he plundered the slain in the company of the wolf".

The sudden (and often apparently unexpected) consolation or "the joy of the happy ending" (FS 99), Tolkien argues in his essay, is in fact an indispensable constituent of a "true fairy-story (or romance)" (103). It must be observed, however, that this joyous turn in *The Hobbit* and particularly in *The Lord of the Rings* was not meant to be in any greater degree 'escapist' or 'fugitive'. It is, as observed by the author himself, a thoroughly unique and "miraculous grace [which] does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*" (99), i.e. a disastrous (or, at any rate, unpleasant) finale, as is often the case in many a battle poem or elegy of Germanic or other provenance where eagles might sometimes be spotted in a company of wolves and ravens. It is only then that this "joy of deliverance" (99) could truly deny "universal final defeat" (99), thus becoming

evangelium or the 'Good News', which in Christian theology is the fulfilment of earlier scriptural prophecies. Such is perhaps also the spectacular coming of the Eagles in *The Lord of the Rings*, in some way 'prophesised' in Bilbo's tale, "long long ago" (LotR 893).

According to Saint Paul, "ever since the creation of the world, [God's] invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made" (Rom. 1:20). Truly potent and unequivocal revelations of the Lord's glory (miracles as well as other wondrous acts and signs), however, appear to be quite rare and cannot always be so easily acknowledged by the more 'rational' people, both Christians and non-believers. Tolkien himself admits in his letter to Forrest J. Ackerman that in terms of their literary impact the Eagles are indeed a "dangerous machine" which he decided to use rather "sparingly", so as not to outstretch "the absolute limit of their credibility or usefulness" (L 210). In other words, they are an enormously potent but at the same time hazardous plot device which he sensibly chooses to employ as a eucatastrophic effect only on a handful of occasions, twice in *The Hobbit* and three times in *The Lord of the Rings*.

There are, of course, many more potential associations that may be identified in connection with the Great Eagles of Tolkien's Middle-earth novels. Being sometimes interpreted as a figurative representation of man's rescue (Deut. 32:11), his spiritual rebirth (Isa. 40:31, *Psalm* 103) and, more generally, as an emblem of resurrection, the eagle clearly ranks amongst the most intriguing beasts in the scriptural canon. Sure enough, these majestic birds were depicted in numerous ways by the biblical narrators, not at all times utterly favourable (Lev. 11:13), sometimes instructive (Prov. 23:5), sometimes portending dramatic events (Rev. 8:13), yet the overall picture appears to be distinctly affirmative, and such is today their universal cognition, conscious as well as intuitive. By placing them in the context of ruthless warfare, Tolkien appears to be superimposing the traditional pre-Christian trope onto the world of his own vivid imagination. It is, however, a world where, somewhat implicitly, the Christian ethics constitutes the most fundamental component, the moral backbone of his sub-created reality. In this way, the æses *georn*[*e*] (107) 'food-greedy' eagles of *The Battle of Maldon* or the *hilde grædige* (162) 'battle-greedy' birds of *Exodus* are figuratively cleansed and absolved of their previous 'sins', so that they may blend in the world of Tolkienian ethics where they could stand side by side with hallowed wizards, morally superior, if still ambiguous, elves and other imaginary creatures from the world of pre-Christian beliefs.

Bibliography

Alexander, Michael (Ed.). *Beowulf: A Glossed Text*. London: Penguin Books, 2000

Bowra, Cecil Maurice. *Heroic Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 1952

Catholic Bible. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006

Kobielus, Stanisław (Ed.). *Fizjologi i Aviarium*. Tyniec Wydawnictwo Benedyktynów, 2005

Lucas, Peter (Ed.). *Exodus*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994

Magoun, Francis Peabody Jr. "The Theme of Beasts of Battle". In: *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 56 (1955): 81-90

Scragg, Donald (Ed.). *The Battle of Maldon*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981

Snorri Sturluson. *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005

Tolkien, John Ronald Reuel. *Farmer Giles of Ham*. Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999

---. *Finn and Hengest. The Fragment and the Episode*. London: HarperCollins, 1998

---. *Morgoth's Ring*. London: HarperCollins, 2002

---. *On Fairy-stories*. London: HarperCollins, 2008

---. *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*. London: HarperCollins, 2014

---. *The Fall of Arthur*. London: HarperCollins, 2013

---. *The Hobbit*. London: HarperCollins, 2013

---. *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*. London: HarperCollins, 2009

---. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. London: HarperCollins, 2006

---. *The Lord of the Rings*. London: HarperCollins, 2005

---. *The Silmarillion*. London: HarperCollins, 2006

Wyatt, Alfred John (Ed.). "The Battle of Brunanburh". *Anglo-Saxon Reader*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965